



Devoid by Rosalie Barvik

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Summary: Season 3 from Billy Hargrove's perspective - SPOILERS!

Devoid

Billy woke up early. He was in the habit of doing so because of school. Most kids slept in on those warm, quiet mornings, taking advantage of summer break. Not Billy. He would stay out late, wake up early. He didn't need much sleep to function. "I'll sleep when I'm dead," was an old running joke he used to have with his best friend, Sid, back in California.

The Hawkins Pool opened at 10:00 am. Billy almost always had the morning shift. Sometimes he would work late into the afternoon and evening, until the pool closed for the day. Billy genuinely enjoyed his job. He liked the feeling of having power to set rules and force people to follow them. He liked the feeling of having so many strangers' lives in his hands. Of having control. But it was a different control than pushing Max around all day. Billy felt like for once in his life he was doing something good. Helping people.

He never thought he would want to care for other people. No one cared for him, anyway. But when a dozen kindergarteners ran through the gate at noon calling his name with gleeful giggles, Billy felt a sense of responsibility to protect these kids. It was his job after all: swim lessons at noon, five days a week. The end of June was nearing and Billy had had his class for over a month. Several of the kids had been so petrified to even get near the water at first, but now, just a month later, they were scrambling to be the first to jump into the deep end. It had taken a lot of coaxing from Billy at first. And self-control. He wasn't big on self-control. He liked controlling other people. Not himself. But he had forced a patient smile, and a cheerful voice, and his class soon trusted him.

Besides these things, another perk of working at a public pool was all the hot chicks in bathing suits. Billy had a good seat too, high up on the raised life guard chair. Not that he ogled at every female. On the contrary, the only hot chick he was really into was his fellow life guard, Heather. She was more into him than he was into her, but that didn't matter. Despite not being genuinely interested, Billy still got a kick out of this one group of middle-aged women who sat tanning all day, lusting over him, he knew. Billy felt their eyes scouring his body. He was a teenager and they were literally all married with kids (most of whom were in his swim class), but he still found it fucking hilarious. Sometimes he would even flirt back at

them. It was great fun.

All things considered, Billy was actually having a pretty good summer. He had casual friends and a casual girlfriend among the other life guards, but he kept them all at arms-length. He didn't want to get too close. He would be leaving Hawkins in less than a year, he hoped. Billy was making good money with his summer job and planned to get another during the school year. He would be a senior in the fall. As soon as he graduated he would high-tail it back to Cali. He'd called Sid that spring and they had agreed Billy could stay with him until he found a permanent job. Then, Billy hoped, things would go back to the way they were before Neil married Susan and they fled to Hawkins. Except Billy would never have to see his dad again. He would be free.

A secret, almost subconscious part of Billy hoped he would be able to contact his mother. He doubted she gave a shit about him; she had left him after all. But Billy gave a shit. He could at least try. He just had to getaway first.

Neil had beat it into his brain (literally) at a young age that "nothing good ever lasted". Billy knew this was true. So he wasn't surprised when his formerly passably to good summer crumbled and shit went south.

The morning that it started was exactly like any other day. Billy awakened at the crack of dawn. He pulled on jeans and a t-shirt and grabbed a pack of cigarettes. He downed a bowl of cereal, then slipped out of the house before anyone else had even stirred from their slumber. Billy figured out that the less he was home, the less beatings he took. So he got out early and got back late.

He barely saw his father. They often went several days without even speaking. But Billy couldn't avoid Neil forever. He would occasionally wake up early or stay up late and corner Billy. He would call him a faggot or a shithead or both if he was feeling particularly inspired. Then Billy would receive a fist to his nose or a palm to his cheek or a belt upon his back. Neil, red in the face, huffing, sneering, would tell him to go to hell, get out of his house, piss off, be a man, etc. That was the typical dismissal. Billy would go to bed. His pillow would muffle his sobs. Several times he couldn't contain it, although he tried his very hardest, and Max would show up in his doorway. He'd tell her to go, but she would stay. She would stay until he let her come to him. Max claimed she knew so much about

first-aid from skateboarding, but that was bullshit. She had a wide array of experience from patching up her brother.

Billy preferred it when Neil "punished" him in the morning. It was much less depressing. He would carry on as usual. He would get in his Camaro and drive to the Hawkins Pool. He would sit on the hood and smoke. Sometimes Heather would join him. She didn't smoke. She just watched him. He would open up the pool and check the bathrooms/lockers to make sure everything was in good shape for the day. Then he would change into his red trunks, smoke some more, and then it was showtime.

That morning was the last time Neil abused Billy. A solid slap to the face. The kind that brought involuntary tears to one's eyes, causing Neil to launch into his "worthless crybaby faggot" routine. Billy didn't let the tears fall though. Not even when he was alone in his Camaro. He cranked up Metallica and bit his tongue. Heather kept asking if he was okay. She was honestly one of the most caring girls Billy had ever met. Not that she cared about him. No one did. But Heather didn't pry for details. She just ran her hands through his long curls and told him she was there if he needed to talk.

Hawkins Pool wasn't very crowded in the mornings. Heather taught a water aerobics class at 10:30. It was mostly elderly ladies who were more interested in gossiping than following the aerobics instructions. Billy found it highly amusing. Heather kept shooting him long-suffering looks.

Swim lessons went smoothly. Holly Wheeler wouldn't stop jumping on Billy's back whenever it was turned on her. Adrian Collinar only had two tantrums. All things considered, it was actually good.

Heather had the shift right after class, meaning Billy took a smoke break and ate a banana. When it was his turn to guard, Billy instantly noticed the women congregated. They all straightened upon seeing him, trying to nonchalantly shift into sexy positions. Fucking hilarious.

Some kid was running again. Billy blew his whistle. Everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at him. Billy yelled, threatening the poor kid with a lifelong ban if he was caught running again. The terrified boy nodded and walked stiffly to his destination. Billy smiled smugly to himself. Power.

His middle-aged stalker lady friends greeted him. Billy caught sight of Holly's mom. She was there every day, same time. She wore a bright blue and pink suit, having ditched her plain old black one. Billy complemented her dismissively. She was really hot. And she paid him a great deal of attention. More than he had received from an adult in the last five years combined. . .

Billy was antsy in the guarding chair. He watched the pool until adult swim was called. Mrs Wheeler was one of the few people to take advantage of it. He watched her carefully. She had three children that he knew of. Nancy was in his class, although he'd never spoken with her. Too preppie, not his type. Mike was one of Max's friends. Holly was the only one Billy actually knew. She was one of his favorite students, so there was that. Billy was pretty sure Karen was bored and just wanted some sexual excitement, but Billy knew she was a mom, and a fairly good one at that. Not perfect, obviously, but he had seen her take care of her children. That was the catch. She cared. Billy didn't want to be that abused teenager who attaches himself to the first adult that shows him any sort of attention, but . . .

Before Billy could stop himself he had engaged in a desperate act of flirtation, inviting Karen Wheeler to a nearby Motel 6 for private swim lessons, which Billy didn't actually teach, but he was certified so he technically could. To Billy's surprise, Karen actually agreed to the rendezvous! He figured their clothes would come off rather quickly and not much swim instruction would take place. She was hot and Billy hadn't gotten laid in awhile, so, well, that was one way to get an adult to pay attention to you.

Billy went home immediately after work. Neil and Susan were at work and Max was God knows where, so Billy took his time getting ready. It was dark when he started back out in his Camaro. He elected to ignore the fact that he was about to go bang his sister's friend's mom. Billy found himself rather giddy. He laughed out loud. Checking himself in a rearview mirror, he began practicing his greeting—

Something suddenly slammed into his windshield. He lost control, the Camaro spinning out, and crashing. Billy's head hit the window hard. Disoriented, he felt blood. Everything from that point was a bit of a blur. His memory seemed fractured.

He got out of the car. . .

He was angry. . .

There was something gooey on the cracked windshield. . .

And then he was being dragged through an empty building, he was in a basement of some type, something was on his face, in his mouth, down his throat, burning, ripping, then gone all together.

Suddenly he was in a phone booth, 911 on dial, but then he wasn't in Hawkins. At least not the same Hawkins. There was white lint or fuzz or some shit like that everywhere. Billy stumbled out. His head was spinning. He stomach flip-flopped.

A crowd was coming towards him. It was a faceless crowd in front of him. Then he was in front of himself, talking in someone else's voice. Billy thought he was hallucinating. But they were there. He was there in front of himself for real.

Just as suddenly as everything had appeared, it dissipated. Billy was alone. He took one shuddering gasp of air and collapsed to his knees, projectile vomiting what little food he had consumed that day, as well as a liquid-y acid. Billy lay on the pavement, panting. He suddenly felt feverishly hot. He stripped down to his underwear.

Then he was pulling his Camaro into the garage. He was home? He didn't remember leaving wherever he was. He didn't remember getting into his car or driving or why there were bags of ice stacked up in the passenger seat. Had he stolen them? He wasn't sure.

Next thing he knew, Billy was lying in the bathtub. Ice was up to his chest. He was shivering violently. But it felt good. The heat was excruciating. He eventually drug himself to bed, and, locking the door behind him, slept naked. His blankets were all discarded on the ground.

The next morning, Billy slept in later than usual. When he first woke up he thought the previous night had all been one big nightmare. Then he stood up and promptly collapsed. His head felt like it was being yanked in

a million different directions. His visions was swimming, black spot danced before his eyes. He lay on his bedroom floor for several minutes, waiting for the awful dizziness to stop. It gradually subsided and Billy shakily got to his feet again. At first he thought he was sick. His entire body was covered in sweat and he felt warm, even though he had slept naked without blankets. But Billy's actually temperature was colder than it should have been.

He decided that the previous night's events were real. Some supernatural bullshit really had occurred and fucked up his body. Either that or Billy was dying. Maybe I have cancer, thought Billy as he got ready for work. He'd a good reason to call in sick. But attending work meant avoiding Neil, so Billy would go. Besides, Billy took care of himself when he was sick anyway. He had ever since his mom left. Luckily, he wasn't sick often. The last time (and first time in three years) he got the flu was last February. He still went to school. He had chugged some cough syrup and showed up for basketball anyway. Billy knew that if he would have told Susan or even Max they would have helped him; but Billy didn't want their help. He could take care of himself.

Billy possibly had the worst day at work ever. He felt like absolute shit. Sitting in the sun for an hour was torture. He had never been very aware of the sun, but that day the sun felt like it was personally attacking Billy. It scorched every cell in his body, burning and scathing. Sweat ran down his face, soaking every bit of clothing on his body.

At the end of that excruciating hour, Karen Wheeler followed Billy back into the pool's building. Billy was dimly aware of her apologizing for not showing up at the motel. He had forgotten all about that. Karen said something about how she had a family. Billy suddenly had a vision-like flash of him bashing her head against the metal racks. He didn't know what was happening.

"Get out," he mumbled.

The other lifeguards kept asking him if he was alright. He eventually said he was "a little under the weather" but insisted he could still work. Heather wasn't convinced. She was a sweet girl, but, God, Billy just wanted her to leave him alone.

Billy was unbearably hot by the end of the day. He did not even know heat from the fucking sun could hurt that bad. It felt like literal fire. Billy took a freezing shower. The pain subsided, but he suddenly noticed something on his arm. There was a black wound on the inside of his forearm. The veins surrounding it were turning black. One word came to Billy's mind: festering. Billy felt himself sink to the shower floor. His head felt like it was being torn between directions again. Someone was talking to him. He couldn't think straight. It was Heather. She was talking to him. Asking if he was hurt. Yes, yes! Billy wanted to scream. There was something seriously wrong with him. He couldn't speak. He realized his body was no longer his own; he had lost all control.

Everything after that came in brief flashes.

He was in a warehouse. The same he had crashed his Camaro by. Heather was on the ground, tied up. Billy wanted to help her. But this other Billy . . . the one under a different control . . . he told her to be still. She screamed and screamed.

The next time Billy was conscious of his surroundings, he was jerked back by a familiar face. Max. What was she doing here? She had one of her weird-ass friends with her too. Billy wanted to warn her, tell her to run, get out of there, but he couldn't.

Billy was at 7/11. He had a cup of ice.

Pain. The sun. It hurt. It really fucking hurt.

He could think clearly again. He was trying to understand. Heather was gone. She hadn't been at work. He had done something to her. But he didn't know what. As he pulled on his jeans, he heard a strange sound. Someone was in the building with him. Billy was annoyed. The pool was closed, it was night, for God's sake. There was a voice. Billy followed it. His conscious started to blur again. But it wasn't gone. Not yet.

Billy followed the voice to the sauna. It was from a walkie-talkie. Billy was more pissed than ever. Some stupid kid must have gotten in to prank him. The sauna door slammed behind him. He whirled around. He was locked in. There was a group of kids standing outside. Max, Billy realized, his temper flaring. Little bitch and her nerdy friends think this is so funny. Well, it's have no idea about what's happening to me.

The sauna was getting warmer. Billy's skin prickled. It would start hurting again soon. It was Max's fault. He wanted to kill her. But he wanted her to help him even more. She knew something was happening to him. She seemed to understand, better than him, at least. Before he knew it, he was begging her for help. He had never shown a sign of weakness in front of her. But there he was, letting down his entire goddamn wall. Billy was crying and pleading. Max was crying too. She was telling him it was going to be okay. It wasn't going to be okay. Billy would never be okay again. He never had been okay. The heat was still intensifying, as was the pain. Billy was gone again.

He was alone. He was lying on his back, staring at the warehouse ceiling. Everything was dark. Everything hurt.

He was sitting in his bedroom. Someone was there. Or a shadow of someone. A girl. The same girl who had been with Max earlier. She wanted something from him. He wasn't sure if he gave it to her or not. He wasn't sure if she was even real.

He was sitting in his Camaro in the parking lot of Starcourt Mall. There was another car. He saw Karen's oldest daughter—Natalie? And Joe, no, Jonathan Byers, as well as Max's friends. He couldn't see Max. He assumed she was there anyway. His master was telling him to drive, to kill them all. But momentarily his master had lost him. His headlights were on. He honked. Please move, please go away, please don't let me hurt you. Master pulled him back under.

"Seven feet."

Billy felt Master jar inside him.

"You told her the wave was seven feet."

Billy was on the ground. The same girl that had visited him in his room was pinned under him. Max's friend.

"You ran to her," the girl continued. "On the beach. There were seagulls."

What was the girl talking about? It seemed . . . familiar.

"She wore a hat with a blue ribbon, a long dress with a blue and red flower, and yellow sandals covered in sand." Tears ran down the girl's face.

Billy knew that woman. He remembered her.

"She was pretty."

Billy closed his eyes. He could see her just as clearly as the day she left.

"She was really pretty."

Tears formed in Billy's eyes. He nodded slightly. She was pretty. He knew. He fully remembered now.

"And you. . . you were happy."

Happy. Happy. What was that again? Oh. It was that distant feeling. The one he had felt a long, long time ago. With . . . Mom.

The girl reached up and lay a gentle hand on Billy's cheek. It was the first time Billy had been touched by someone with love since his mother left. Touching meant Neil. And Neil meant pain. But this girl, his sister's best friend. She was comforting him. She was trying to help. This thing, his master, this monster inside him. It was trying to kill this girl. And Billy had subconsciously helped it. But he was no longer in a void of subconsciousness.

Billy was back. He was in control.

He stood slowly up. He faced the hideous creature that was closing in. The girl crawled away. She was hurt. She couldn't run. But she did not have to. Billy wasn't going to let this son of a bitch hurt her.

The creature extended an arm-like appendage out, reaching for the girl. Billy thrust both of his strong arms out. They collided with the thing, pushing him back. But Billy held firm. He cried out as the claws raked his flesh. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw more clawed "arms" coming towards him. One pierced his side, clamping onto his skin. Before Billy could react, another clamped onto his other side. White-hot pain seared through him. Two more dug into his back, ripping his flesh. He let out a strangled-cry, feeling his world go dim. The creature's face opened up, its dozen of teeth gleaming in the Mall's pale blue light. Billy screamed. He felt his master drilling inside him. Something was flowing out of his mouth, but it wasn't blood or saliva. The appendage that had first come at the girl, the one Billy had stopped from killing her, wavered in front of him a moment, before plunging straight into his chest.

"BILLY!" A girl shrieked.

M-Max? Before Billy could properly process his sister's anguished cry and the agonizing pain coursing through him, the creature let go. He gasped. His head fell back. He was falling. He hit the ground. He was losing all sense.

The creature was roaring. People were screaming. Then the ground shook as the creature fell, dead. How? he didn't know. It was gone. Billy was going too. He felt his body begin to shut down. He couldn't breathe. Something was missing. Master. Billy's mind was fully cleared. He wasn't sure of much. But he knew he was free. Whatever had been controlling him was dead and gone. He felt cold and clammy. The uncomfortable sense of heat had been replaced by ravaging pain. Everything had gone dim.

It was over. Thank God, it was finally over.

"Billy?" A familiar voice. Max was standing over him, a horrified expression on her face. "Billy," She dropped to her knees at his side. "Billy, Billy, get up, please, get up. . . please."

He could not.

"Billy, Billy, please." She sobbed.

Billy was an asshole and Max was a bitch, but they were family. Although

they had never — and now would never — admit it, they did love each other. In a confused, twisted way, they truly cared for one another.

Billy was dying. It hurt less which he knew meant his life was ending. Neil couldn't hit him, his mother couldn't leave him. Nobody could hurt him now. But with an ounce of chagrin, Billy realized he would miss Max. She had never hurt him, anyway. He had hurt her though. He had never directly imitated Neil's abuse, but he had beat her down with words to make himself feel in control.

"I'm sorry." And he meant it.

"Billy . . ."

He heard his little sister whisper his name once more, and then he was dead.